

25X1

Approved For Release 2003/08/26 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000200270001-1

NSC BRIEFING

7 May 1954

THE VIET MINH THREAT TO THE TONKIN DELTA

I. Although world attention has concentrated on Dien Bien Phu, it is actually the rice rich Tonkin delta, and its 7,000,000 people, that has always been the strategic prize of the Indochina war.

A. The Viet Minh will do all they can to capitalize on the confusion and shock of the French and anti-Communist Vietnamese over the fall of Dien Bien Phu.

B. Might try to maintain present momentum by making an early all-out effort to take the delta.

NSA review completed

State Department review completed

25X1

Approved For Release 2003/08/26 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000200270001-1

25X1

Approved For Release 2003/08/26 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000200270001-1

II. The French are usually pictured as holding most of the delta, while the Viet Minh infiltrate and stage guerrilla attacks.

A. But

Viet Minh's so-called "infiltration" is so widespread that it might be more accurate to say that the French are the infiltrators.

B. Major part of French strength of 192,500 is tied down in numerous little posts dotting the countryside and in protection of major towns and lines of communications.

1. French now have firm hold only on some 700 of the more than 5,000 Tonkin delta villages.

25X1

25X1

Approved For Release 2003/08/26 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000200270001-1

C. Viet Minh forces of 76,000 in and around the delta move freely about the countryside in large bands attacking French installations at will.

III. Much of Viet Minh strength lies in elusiveness.

A. When approached by superior numbers, they trade rifle for hoe and vanish among the farmers. If surprised, they may become human submarines, hiding under water in flooded fields and breathing through bamboo tubes.

IV. If started on its way soon, most of the battle-tested Viet Minh force of about 30,000 now at Dien Bien Phu could reach the Tonkin delta <sup>in</sup> two or three weeks, <sup>well</sup> before the heavy rains begin in early July.

A. But victors at Dien Bien Phu may not be needed, since Viet Minh forces in and around the delta have not yet made all-out effort and degree of demoralization of delta defenders is unknown factor at present.

25X1

Approved For Release 2003/08/26 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000200270001-1

V. U.S. Consul Sturm, just returned from Hanoi, feels the signal for a big Viet Minh offensive may well be an attempt to capture Nam Dinh, third most important city in the Tonkin delta. (Pop: 25,000)

A. Example of ability to surprise and seize ~~initiative~~ is fact that over a month ago, a small Viet Minh group, disguised as women, seized the marketplace of Nam Dinh and held it for several hours. Group melted away in crowd when French troops approached.

B. Tonkin capital, Hanoi, is an equally likely target. By permanently cutting the city's communications with the port of Haiphong, the Viet Minh might stifle the French into submission. Hanoi needs 2,000 tons

Approved For Release 2003/08/26 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000200270001-1

25X1

of supplies daily from Haiphong.

C. Hanoi is also believed vulnerable  
to attack from within.

25X1

the enemy

is bringing in quantities of  
explosives and guns for sabotage  
or an internal uprising. Past  
estimates of Viet Minh underground  
strength in Hanoi range from hundreds  
to thousands.

25X1

25X1

Approved For Release 2003/08/26 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000200270001-1

Approved For Release 2003/08/26 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000200270001-1